Starting salaries of college graduates

One of the values that students place on the field of study they choose for their bachelor's degree is the earning potential associated with occupations in that field. Starting salaries offered by employers are related not only to the value of the skills learned by college graduates but also to the supply of qualified individuals. Thus, differences in starting salaries shed light on the changing demands of the labor market and the response of students and the education system to those changes.

- Between 1977 and 1993, college graduates who majored in computer sciences and engineering had much higher starting salaries than did graduates in all other fields of study; while the salary benefit of majoring in such fields was high, it declined between 1980 and 1993.
- Starting salaries among graduates who majored in the humanities or education have fluctuated over time, but in general, they were considerably lower than the starting salaries for all graduates.
- Among 1993 graduates, females were much more likely than males to major in education, and males were more likely than females to major in computer sciences and engineering. The most common field of study for both males and females was business; the starting salary benefits for those who majored in this field increased between 1986 and 1993.
- Median starting salaries for 1993 male graduates were substantially higher than those for female graduates, both overall and within certain fields of study including business, social and behavioral sciences, and natural sciences.

Percentage difference between median starting salaries for all college graduates and college graduates in major fields of study: Years of graduation 1977–93

	Year of graduation					
Major field of study	1977	1980	1984	1986	1990	1993
	Percent above or (below) median for all college graduates					
Humanities	(20.3)	(15.4)	(18.6)	(17.1)	(13.6)	(11.1)
Social and behavioral sciences	(10.6)	(11.4)	(12.6)	(8.8)	(9.4)	(9.0)
Natural sciences	(1.8)	(0.8)	(5.0)	(6.2)	(1.8)	(7.5)
Computer sciences and engineering	46.4	61.0	44.8	34.3	41.0	35.8
Education	(14.1)	(18.6)	(20.1)	(18.6)	(11.7)	(15.3)
Business and management	14.4	13.2	4.8	2.6	4.6	10.4
Other professional or technical	2.8	6.8	(1.3)	(2.9)	2.2	3.3

Annual median starting salaries (in 1997 constant dollars) of 1993 college graduates, by sex and major field of study, and the percentage difference between male and female starting salaries

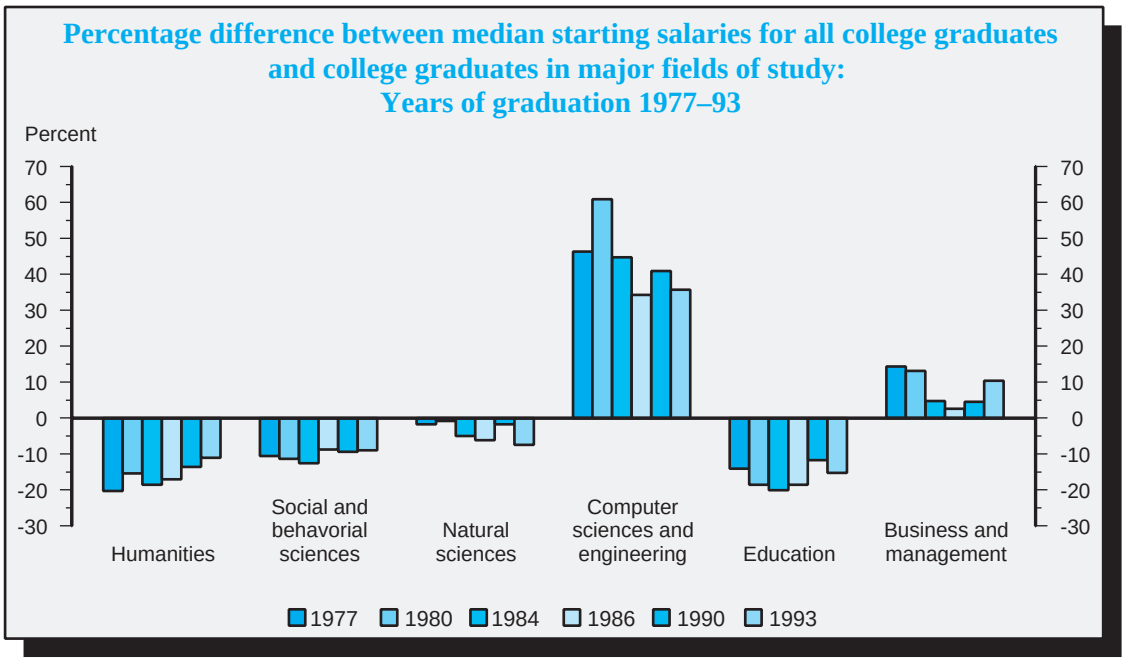
		Male		Female		
Major field of study	All graduates	Percentage in field	Median starting salary	Percentage in field	Median starting salary	Female/male percentage difference
Total	**$24,156**	**100**	**$26,738**	**100**	**$22,508**	***(15.8)**
Humanities	21,469	9	22,307	12	21,100	(5.4)
Social and behavioral sciences	21,984	13	23,885	15	21,061	*(11.8)
Natural sciences	22,347	7	24,798	6	20,991	*(15.3)
Computer sciences and engineering	32,802	16	33,148	3	30,866	(6.9)
Education	20,456	6	21,737	17	20,114	(7.5)
Business and management	26,658	32	28,382	23	24,363	*(14.2)
Other professional or technical	24,959	17	24,938	23	24,974	0.1

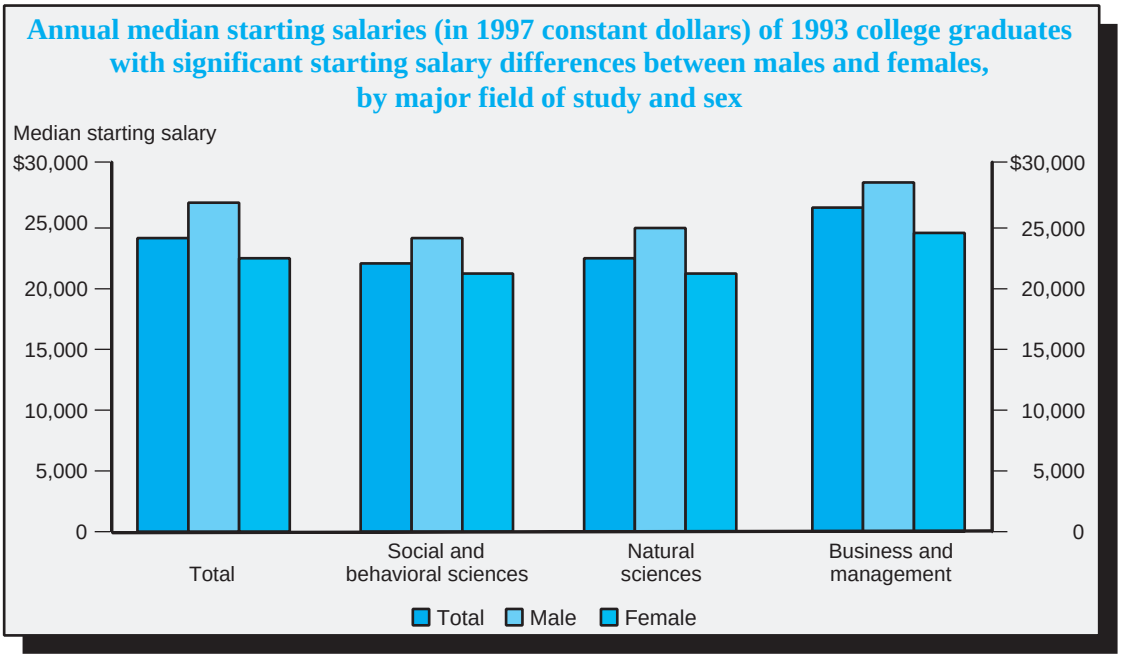
* Male starting salaries were greater than female salaries ($p < 0.05$).

NOTE: Data presented are for bachelor's degree recipients who were working full time and who were not enrolled in postsecondary education 1 year after graduation. Details may not add to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduates surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Starting salaries of college graduates





NOTE: Data presented are for bachelor's degree recipients who were working full time and who were not enrolled in postsecondary education 1 year after graduation.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduates surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Table S33(a) Standard errors for the first text table in *Indicator 33*

Major field of study	Year of graduation					
	1977	1980	1984	1986	1990	1993
Humanities	3.5	2.0	2.5	1.5	2.4	2.2
Social and behavioral sciences	1.9	1.8	2.3	1.9	1.6	1.6
Natural sciences	3.2	4.2	3.2	2.3	3.2	2.3
Computer sciences and engineering	2.9	2.9	2.0	1.6	1.8	2.9
Education	1.3	1.2	1.8	1.2	1.7	1.7
Business and management	1.7	1.9	1.4	0.8	1.6	2.3
Other professional or technical	2.8	2.2	1.7	1.2	2.1	2.5

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduate surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Table S33(b) Standard errors for the second text table in *Indicator 33*

Major field of study	All graduates	Male		Female	
		Percentage in field	Median starting salary	Percentage in field	Median starting salary
Total	**$249**	**—**	**$390**	**—**	**$233**
Humanities	500	0.8	703	0.8	522
Social and behavioral sciences	350	0.8	697	0.8	444
Natural sciences	517	0.6	940	0.6	720
Computer sciences and engineering	636	1.2	662	0.4	1,640
Education	362	0.6	725	1.8	398
Business and management	539	1.6	671	1.2	582
Other professional or technical	581	1.2	1,009	1.1	764

— Not applicable.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).